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ABSTRACT

From October 30, 1994 to November 4, 1994 the International Peace Research Association held its 15th general conference in Malta. Over 200 delegates from 40 different countries attended the week long gathering whose theme was "International Conflicts: The Role of Peace Research and Education." The conference featured plenary sessions in the morning followed by working sessions where the participants could focus on specific peace related concerns by taking part in various commissions. This report gives an overview of the conference. (RJC)

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INTERNATIONAL PEACE RESEARCH ASSOCIATION MEETS IN MALTA

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INTERNATIONAL PEACE RESEARCH ASSOCIATION MEETS IN MALTA

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From October 30, 1994 to November 4, 1994 the International Peace Research Association (IPRA) held its 15th general conference on the island of Malta in the Mediterranean Conference center. Over 200 delegates from 40 different countries attended the week long gathering whose theme was "International Conflicts: The Role of Peace Research and Education."

A preconference workshop featured Richard Falk, the author of "From Geopolitics to Humane Governance: Toward a New Global Politics." The conference itself featured plenary sessions in the morning followed by working sessions where paritcipants could focus on specific peace related concerns by taking part in various commissions. Plenaries focussed on intercultural conflicts, the work of UNESCO to build a culture of peace, the prospects for peace in the Mediterranean basin, and ethnicity and conflict resolution. On Sunday night the delegates were treated to a traditional village festival in the small village of Gudja. On Wednesday night the Antioch College theater department produced a play "The First and Last," which was written and performed by 20 students from Antioch. On Friday the Foundation for International Studies, which hosted the conference, held a reception for all the delegates. During the conference itself, tours were arranged so that delegates could visit 6000 year old goddess temples and other historic sites on Malta.

IPRA has over 1500 members from 75 different countries. Its work takes place through the following commissions: changes in Eastern Europe, communications, defense and disarmament, food policy, human marginalization in the global political economy, internal conflict and conflict resolution, international conflict resolution, nonviolence, peace building in crisis areas, peace education, peace history, peace movements, refugees, and women and peace. Each of these commissions met regularly during the week, which allowed delegates to engage in lengthy, in-depth discussions about their research interests.

In addition, the various regional peace associations held meetings. These associations are the African Peace Research Association, the Asia Pacific Research Association, the Latin American Peace Research Association, the Consortium on Peace Research, Education, and Development (representing North America), and the European Peace Research Association. Some of these associations hold annual meetings in their respective parts of the world, while IPRA holds its meetings biannually. The next IPRA Conference will take place in Australia during the summer of 1996.

Plenary sessions focused on the role of identity, and how ethnic identities transcend national borders. Much conflict occurs on this planet because ten thousand ethnic groups contain people who do not fit neatly into national state systems. Indigenous conflicts are appearing all over the world because of the inability of states to develop systems for intercultural integration. How can autonomous areas be created to represent the interests of different people? How can nations, individuals, and groups develop skills to transcend conflicts and respect individual rights? How can communication skills to achieve tolerance be developed? Are recent technical developments, like e-mail, a way of developing constructive transnational dialogue or will they end up further excluding the poor in Western nations, and indigenous people throughout the planet who do not have access to expensive technologies? People in the West and North often seek technological solutions to problems that are moral in nature. Elise Boulding reported that there are indigenous networks developing on this planet that are becoming international nongovernment organizations (INGOs) representing the interests of people like the Kurds, who do not receive expression through the nation state system. She sees some hope in communications links built through 20,000 INGOs that are building a planetary civil society.

Many speakers were critical of the media which often report on conflicts as if there were only two parties involved (the good guys and bad guys), ignoring the key role of third party interventions, which always take place in conflict situations. Because the work of peace promoters around the world is ignored by the media, citizens who know nothing about peacemaking look to armed ways to settle diputes. One key challenge to peace research is to get accurate information about these conflicts and report it to the general public.

Delegates from highly instable parts of the world (Africa, Middle East, Eastern Europe) reported that because no social group can live with disorder, there are struggles to achieve power within states where elites impose solutions. People in power in many of these violent areas are forced to listen to the loudest voices, which puts pressures on society to reflect slogans promoted

by elites. Models of stable western democracies aren't working in highly conflicted areas because suppressed nationalities are busting out all over and there is a high degree of economic instability. In the midst of this instability people are grasping onto their ethnic identities. Groups, like the Serbs, are attempting to assert their identity to the exclusion of all others and have no democratic traditions to fall back upon to help create heterogenous state systems that respect the rights of diverse groups. Delegates were reminded that so called stable western democracies were themselves built upon conflict. The United States was built through genocide and France through ethnocide. Ethnic minorities are further threatened because the information economy requires people to learn majority languages like Japanese, French, Spanish, or English in order to compete. The global market and popular culture requires language skills which devalue mother tongues and ethnic traditions.

Johan Galtung defined peace as a process when a creative resolution of conflict takes place nonviolently. He saw that peace workers transform conflict to a nonviolent realm, but they don't solve them in the sense that conflicts magically disappear. Other speakers spoke of peace promoters who transform conflicts through dialogue, getting conflicting parties to try something they hadn't imagined. Galtung urged the delegates to be critical of the legal paradigm which normalizes institutional violence, like capital punishment. Courts, police, and judicial systems are self righteous, unforgiving, arrogant, and condemn others. He held out as an example the Truth Commission being established in South Africa whose role is to find out what happened, not punish, but also not forget. The point is to find out what went wrong and what could have been done differently. We are all fallible human beings.

One session addressed the question, "Where have all the peace movements gone?" Experts on this topic from around the world said that we need to think of peace movements in broad historical contexts, that they ebb and flow, go through periods of contraction and times of mass mobilization. Their adherents are often prophetic voices that aren't taken notice of in the broader society. Peace movements have different dimensions - movements to stop war, green movements, attempts to demilitarize society, and most recently struggles to end domestic violence. Anti-nuclear movements of the 1980s have taken new forms but are keeping alive certain networks. For example, in the city where I live, Milwaukee, Wisconsin, various peace groups have been working hard to pass a referendum that would ban handguns that was roundly defeated by two thirds margin in an election that took place the day after I returned from the IPRA conference. Peace movements now are concerned with all

forms of violence, not just wars. Many previous anti-nuclear activists are now working on social justice and cultural diversity initiatives. Transnational organizations like Amnesty International are popular, as are attempts to teach the skills of conflict resolution in schools. Peace movements in general seem to lack a comprehensive theory that people can grab onto. Is there a fundamental reason why peace activists can't agree with each other? Young people today seem more motivated by ethical and religious concerns than political causes. Some peace promoters still active in peace movements are addressing the upcoming renewal of the comprehensive test ban treaty. Social movements that develop an identity at one time have to shift their identities to fit changing circumstances or lose their membership.

The largest commission at the IPRA meeting was the Peace Education Commission, which was attended by over 60 delegates. Papers presented at this commission discussed the role of nonviolence in education, the history of peace education from a variety of different parts of the world, audio-visual means of communicating peace, peace education in African settings, the social context for peace education, conflict resolution in peace education, the psychological aspects of peace education, and how to live with differences in building a multicultural society. The papers presented a wide variety of perspectives, from a plea from Australia to incorporate indigenous values in peace education, to a presentation by a professor from the United States who uses computerized simulations in his peace studies courses. There was a discussion of adult education for peace in countries like Japan and Denmark (One delegate discussed the role of the people's college at Helsingør, Denmark which has for seven decades been promoting peace education.) as well as an analysis of how young children learn or do no not learn peace concepts. Class-room practice was discussed as well as the use of postage stamps to promote peace. The role of peace education in building a new society was presented by delegates from the former Yugoslavia, Israel, Lithuania, Germany, and South Africa.

Åke Bjerstedt from Sweden, the chair of the peace education commission, reported on a survey he had done that indicated that not very much is being done to promote peace education around the world. Delegates felt it was important to incorporate peace education into teacher training, so that teachers know how to teach their students about conflict resolution and nonviolence, but most state run systems are not actively promoting peace education. Although the delegates at the IPRA conference had a rich variety of ideas about how to promote peace education via teacher training, they are running into financial, political, psychological, and institutional barriers in their home

countries that make difficult the promulgation of peace education. Delegates at the IPRA conference learned that peace education and peace research provides important solutions to problems faced in the modern world, but the popular media in militarized cultures do not seem interested in reporting on these solutions.

Note: More detailed information about the peace education sessions is presented in a 213-page conference report ("Education for peace: A conference report from Malta", 1994), available from School of Education, Box 23 501, SE-200 45 Malmö, Sweden.

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